

Statement Census Hearing 3/5/09
Rep. Carolyn Maloney

Thank you Chairman Clay for calling this hearing and thank you Chairman Towns for attending as well as Ranking Members Issa and McHenry.

Well, it must be the year before the decennial since the Census is now so much in the news. As Yogi Berra used to say, it is déjà vu all over again. This is just like it was 1999; we have press conferences, press releases, charges and accusations so the Census must be next year.

Today we have a hearing to see how the Census is doing in getting ready for 2010 but this hearing is where the similarities to 2000 end. The controversies of the 2000 Census were over the attempts by the scientists at the Census to use methods to improve and get a more accurate count. These were ideological differences over how to accomplish that goal. Today we face a Census that has real operational issues.

A Census that is facing many last minute operational changes that have not been field tested to the extent that operational issues were field tested in 2000 -- not nearly close.

Let's look at the fingerprinting operation added just last summer by the Bush administration. Hundreds of thousands of applicants that Census will want to hire will have to be fingerprinted, the images run thru the Justice Department's computers and then the results returned to the local field offices. None of this operation has had a field test any where close to the type of testing that was done prior to 2000 for similar operations.

What if it fails or slows the hiring process?

Or let us look at the proposed second mailing of Census forms. Here you have an operation that was looked at in 2000 and rejected in 2000 that has been added to 2010 without a clear explanation as to how the problems the led to its rejection in 2000 would be dealt with.

Or how the management systems that handle payroll and the enumerators work since we have had to revert to a paper census. None of them have been given testing any where close to what was done in for 2000.

Hopefully we will hear good news today but I suspect that we will not hear enough that will convince us that there will not be real operation problems later this year.

Mr. Chairman, as we look at the 2010 census in the coming months I would hope that the committee will also take the time to start looking at 2020, something I know that GAO is doing, as to how we can avoid this situation in the future. As you know I along with Congressman Dent and Charlie Gonzales have put in legislation to make the Census

an independent agency, to allow it to work over the ten year cycle of the census without interference. I hope that the committee will be able to look at that in the coming months as we deal with the problems we will be facing in 2010.

Thank you